

The response of Nottingham City Council and the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board to

The Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the Review of the effectiveness of the local Safeguarding Children Board

In partnership with



Inspection date: 11 March 2014 – 2 April 2014



Nottingham
City Council

This document is designed to celebrate what we are doing well, acknowledge the improvements we need to make and explain the action we will take.



Foreword

Nottingham children are safe. Those four words matter.

Ofsted arrived for their unannounced inspection on the 11th March 2014 and, after three weeks of rigorous investigation they left with the conclusion that children in our City are safe.

Their judgement confirms that, as a local authority and Safeguarding Children Board we put in place effective measures to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable children.

Nottingham City is committed to providing 'Good' services; we recognise there is more we must do to improve our work. This was our first inspection under the new Ofsted framework, a framework which has been designed to meet the recommendations of Professor Eileen Munro that inspections should focus on outcomes and children's experiences, rather than strategy or processes.

Ofsted have been clear that the new inspection framework is a 'tougher test' and that authorities have to work harder to achieve the top ratings of 'Good' and 'Outstanding'. The new framework is designed to raise standards and improve practice. The overall judgement received from Ofsted was 'Requires Improvement'.

We found that this inspection was far more focused on the child's journey with much greater emphasis placed on observing and assessing practice. A strong theme of the weaknesses identified by Ofsted concern

our 'back office' functions, specifically our I.T. and case recording systems, which we recognise need significant improvement.

We wholeheartedly support Ofsted's drive to raise the bar for safeguarding inspections; it's tougher for councils but better for children. Our challenge now is to make the improvements necessary to secure a 'Good' rating. At a time when Government budgets are reducing and case referrals are increasing we are facing a substantial challenge, but it is one we will rise to.

This document is not intended to replicate Ofsted's official report, which can be found here www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/nottingham it is designed to celebrate what we are doing well, acknowledge the improvements we need to make and explain the action we will take.

We must conclude by thanking the Children and Adults workforce. Time and time again the passion, commitment and professionalism of our teams has been recognised by Ofsted as something to be celebrated as truly special here in Nottingham. We are proud of the people who work tirelessly on behalf of the children and young people of our City. Our teams do the most important job in the world, they keep Nottingham children safe.

Thank you

Cllr David Mellen
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Nottingham City Council

Alison Michalska
Corporate Director for Children and Adults
Nottingham City Council

Paul Burnett
Independent Chair
Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board

Children benefit from being able to access a wide range of effective early help services.



1 Children who need help and protection

What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure that children and young people who are, or who are likely to be at risk of harm or who are the subject of concern, are identified and protected. Help is provided early in the emergence of a problem and is well co-ordinated through multi-agency arrangements. Thresholds between early help and statutory child protection work are appropriate, understood and operate effectively. Records of action and decisions are clear and up to date. Children and young people are listened to and heard. Social workers build effective relationships with them and their families in order to assess the likelihood of and capacity for change. Children and young people experience timely, multi-agency help and protection through risk-based assessment, authoritative practice, planning and review that secures change.

Ofsted have judged that the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection requires improvement

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- Children benefit from being able to access a wide range of effective early help services.
- There is good use of the Family Support Strategy and Pathway and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF); Lead Practitioner role is well embedded in agencies in the City.
- The effective use of Step Up/Step Down processes supports escalation and de-escalation of cases between the Council's Family Community Teams and Children's Social Care Directorates.
- Children are visited regularly and they are seen alone where necessary.
- Young people receive help which is proportionate to the risk, avoiding unnecessary statutory interventions.
- The introduction of Children & Families Direct, a new service that ensures that professionals and members of the public have easy access to advice and expertise.
- There are effective systems to ensure that children who have been referred to the Children's Social Care Screening & Duty Team a number of times, but have not met the threshold, do not fall through the net.
- Assessments at the 'front door' are good at taking into account the Signs of Safety tool.
- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role is managing allegations well, taking them seriously and dealing with them correctly.
- Families are well supported by the Disabled Children's Team; there is a variety of support services available and smooth transition of services.
- The Domestic Abuse Referral Team (DART) provides a thorough multi agency response to incidents of domestic violence.
- The Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and the Multi Agency Pregnant Liaison Group (MAPLG) provide effective multi agency support.
- Arrangements to protect children who are at risk of, or subject to, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and/or going missing are co-ordinated and satisfactory, they are subject to ongoing robust monitoring.
- Monitoring of Private Fostering arrangements is good and the statutory requirements are met.

1 Children who need help and protection continued

Identifying areas for improvement:

- The quality of assessments (including the CAF) can be variable; some lack basic information, the voice of the child is not always evident and some are not regularly updated.
- There are a number of Child in Need cases awaiting allocation to a social worker.
- Children's plans are not always SMART and outcome or child focussed.
- Escalation processes are not always used effectively by partners, particularly when parents do not engage with support. This can lead to drift.
- Issues with capacity in the Council's Independent Reviewing Team means that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are not always able to follow up and challenge progress on recommendations made in conferences between meetings.
- Supervision needs to be more reflective.

Taking action to improve:

We had already planned to introduce our Continuous Assessment (to replace the Initial and Core Assessments) in April 2014. The re-design of this assessment form means that many of the issues identified by Inspectors have already been addressed.

Over the next few months we will look to review the templates for key plans to ensure that they support workers to be SMART and outcome focussed.

We will also set out clear standards with regards to how often plans and assessments should be updated.

We had already commissioned a review of our IT systems in late 2013 and we are now looking to develop a more detailed options appraisal and delivery plan to ensure we have a recording system that is fit for purpose.

We are also working to ensure that capacity in key teams meets the increasing demands in the children's social care system. We are recruiting additional Independent Reviewing Officers and Social Workers.



Young people benefit from warm, nurturing relationships with key staff and managers; and say that they feel safe where they live.

2 Children looked after and achieving permanence

What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure decisions about children and young people becoming looked after are made using high-quality assessments about the risk of harm or actual harm to them and the likelihood of change in their family. Thresholds are clear and applied appropriately. Children and young people are listened to by social workers who know them well. Adults working with children and young people help them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences, to progress well and achieve educationally, and to influence decisions about their future. They return home with the support they need and when it is safe for them. If this is not possible, they live in stable placements where they are helped to build positive relationships and maintain contact with their family and friends where this remains in their best interests. Care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that the child or young person's current and developing needs continue to be met. Permanent homes and families are found for children and young people without unnecessary delay. Their needs are met and they live with their brothers and sisters if that is assessed as being in their best interests. They do not experience placement disruption. They develop safe and secure relationships with adults that persist over time. When support is needed, children, young people and families are able to access it for as long as it is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond.

Ofsted have judged that the experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence requires improvement

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- Decisions to accommodate young people are made in their best interests.
- Children and young people at risk of coming into care are offered support. Our Edge of Care interventions and Panel enable children to remain at home if it is appropriate and safe for them to do so.
- Good use is made of legal proceedings including pre-proceeding work. This means that parents understand what needs to change and the consequences if changes are not made.
- Agreement about the best plan for a child in care is reached in a timely manner. There are good relationships with the courts and there is always consideration of all options to secure permanence for the child.
- Looked after Children are visited regularly and they are seen alone when necessary.
- Social Workers and other staff with whom Inspectors spoke expressed good understanding of the need to build positive relationships with children and young people; workers know their children well.
- Children know how to access support and how to complain, they have access to independent advocacy.
- Brothers and sisters are placed together wherever possible.
- There is a strong plan in place to recruit more Foster Carers which will provide better choice of carers for our children in care.
- Foster Carers' views are consistently sought; carers are passionate about the young people who lived with them and they had appropriate levels of delegated authority to make day to day decisions for children in their care.
- Stability of placements is generally good and many children live in Good or Outstanding provision which is well-matched to meet their individual needs.

2 Children looked after and achieving permanence continued

Identifying areas for improvement:

- Educational attainment for looked after children is a mixed picture. The quality of Personal Education Plans is variable and the Virtual School could be strengthened.
- Health assessments and Health Care Plans for looked after children are not always up to date or available on file.
- Improvements are required to ensure that we recruit more, local Foster Carers and that they are well supported and trained.
- Placement matching for some children is not as strong as we would like due to capacity issues in the market. Information is not always immediately available to carers to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of the child.

Taking action to improve:

We had already been working closely with health partners to address issues with medicals and plans for Looked after Children and over the next few months we will continue to drive performance across the partnership.

We will also be looking at how we can strengthen our Virtual School to ensure it is proactive in addressing barriers to learning and attainment for our children in care.

We have been working to improve our fostering and adoption processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose, meet all National Minimum Standards and offer good support to our carers.

We continue to seek caring families with the skills to offer a home to our vulnerable children.

2.1 Adoption performance

What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure suitable adoptive families are identified without delay for all children for whom adoption is in their best interests. The recruitment and assessment arrangements are aligned with national systems and enable potential adopters to consider and to be considered for a wide range of children for whom they may provide a home. Children are able to develop safe and secure relationships with their adoptive family that persist over time. When support is needed, children, young people, families and carers are able to access it for as long as it is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond.

Ofsted have judged that the graded judgment for adoption performance requires improvement

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- There is a year on year increase in the number of children being adopted.
- Potential adopters spoke of a positive experience.
- The new team of Adoption Placement Advisors are having a very positive impact on family finding. They are ambitious, creative and well thought of by Social Workers and families. There is good use of life story work.
- The new Marketing Strategy is attracting more people to adopt.
- Panel recommendations are robustly considered by the agency decision maker to ensure that every permanent placement is in the child's best interests.
- There are good examples of adoption packages, which are individualised and creative using a range of support services with good support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Identifying areas for improvement:

- In most cases there was evidence of some delay in progressing plans for adoption and family finding wasn't always commenced quickly enough. Delays are not always challenged by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Permanency is considered at the second review although adoption wasn't always considered.
- When families request post-adoption support they do not always receive a package as quickly as we would like.
- There is no clear evidence of parallel/concurrent planning to ensure that children can be progressed as quickly as possible through the system.

Taking action to improve:

We are planning to review policies and procedures to ensure that our social care workforce understands and puts into practice concurrent planning where appropriate. Inspectors commented positively on our Adoption Placements Advisors which are new posts designed to improve the timeliness of family finding.

We are already seeing some improvements here and we will continue to monitor this over the coming months.

We will be looking more closely at post-adoption support to ensure that families receive a good package of support and receive a timely response to specific requests for help.

2.2 Experiences and progress of care leavers

What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure that young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood. Plans for them to leave care are effective and address their individual needs. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live. Young people acquire the necessary level of skill and emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence. They are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing. They enjoy stable and enduring relationships with staff and carers who meet their needs.

Ofsted have judged that the experiences and progress of care leavers requires improvement

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- Young people benefit from warm, nurturing relationships with key staff and managers.
- Staff have a positive impact on the children they are working with.
- Pathways Plans are up to date and young people are involved in developing their own plans.
- There are high numbers of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation. The authority is performing very well compared with statistical neighbours and the close working relationship with Nottingham City Homes is a strength.
- Young people say that they feel safe where they live.
- Young unaccompanied asylum seekers receive appropriate and timely support to access accommodation.
- There is good support with the transition to independence and around basic skills (cooking, budgeting etc).
- The standard of statutory visits is met and in some cases exceeded.

Taking action to improve:

We are already working with Care Leavers to re-design the Pathway Plan template to ensure that it is concise and fit for purpose.

We will work closely with health partners to ensure that every child leaving care receives a 'health passport' with details of their full health history.

- Young people are given good advice about their rights.
- Health needs are addressed and young people understand how to access primary health care. Care Leavers readily have access to therapeutic services.
- Participation is a key strength. At the Children in Care Council individual opinions are valued and young people feel it is a safe environment. Care Leavers have good opportunities to contribute to service design and their contribution is valued.
- The Apprenticeship Programme for Care Leavers is a positive initiative.

Identifying areas for improvement:

- Pathway Plans were too lengthy and lacked rigorous analysis. Some young people reported that they felt their Pathway Plan had no impact on their life.
- Young people are not routinely provided with, nor know how to access their full health history.
- Too many Care Leavers are not in Education, Employment or Training.

The current economic climate means all young people are finding it hard to gain employment, or perhaps feel that they cannot afford to go to University. The partnership are working hard to ensure that Care Leavers have opportunities to access further education or find work.

We will keep a sharp focus on this issue through our Corporate Parenting Board.

The local authority has continued to invest in early intervention and prevention and there is evidence of the positive impact that this is having due to the rising attendance levels in primary schools.



3 Leadership, management and governance

What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure that leadership, management and governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance and together establish an effective strategy and good-quality services for children, young people and their families.

There is a clear and up-to-date strategy for commissioning and developing services delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced workforce that meets the needs of local children and young people and families.

The Director of Children's Services (DCS), the lead elected member and the senior management team have a comprehensive knowledge about what is happening at the 'front line' to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively. They know and understand the difference that help, care and protection are making. They oversee systematic performance management and monitoring that demonstrate rigorous and timely action in response to service deficiencies or new demands.

The local authority works with partners to deliver early help, protect children and young people, improve educational attainment and narrow the gap for the children looked after and care leavers.

It acts as a strong and effective corporate parent for children looked after and those leaving or who have left care.

Leaders, both professional and political, drive continuous improvement so that the local authority is consistently effective as the lead agency for the protection and care of children and young people and as a corporate parent. Partnerships are supported by transparent and rigorous governance between the local authority and key statutory, private and voluntary organisations. Shared priorities are clear and resourced.

There is effective engagement with the relevant local partnerships including the Health and Well-being Board.

The DCS works closely with the LSCB chair and the chief executive holds the LSCB chair to account for the effectiveness of the LSCB.

Ofsted have judged that leadership, management and governance requires improvement

3 Leadership, management and governance continued

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- Managers have lots of energy, commitment and ambition but there is not always clear prioritisation.
- Senior managers have a good understanding of the need for future development.
- The local authority has continued to invest in early intervention and prevention and there is evidence of the positive impact that this is having due to the rising attendance levels in primary schools.
- There is a well developed strategic framework; the architecture of governance is in evidence and there are good links between groups.
- Strategic priorities are clear and linked to Performance Indicators; there is a named manager for each of these.
- The Lead Member is highly visible and actively involved with services, he also has regular interaction with young people.
- There are good and effective partnerships especially with Health, Housing, the Police and local business. This is evident in the work around domestic violence and CAMHS.
- The local authority knows its communities well.

- The Corporate Parenting Board has helped with a variety of projects and schemes.
- The Chief Executive has good oversight of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and meets regularly with the Chair and Director of Children's Services (DCS); there is two-way challenge.
- There is an extensive dataset which is used to hold managers to account and to inform the work of the commissioning team.
- There is a committed workforce despite the challenges and difficulties they face.
- Staff noted that they feel well supported.

Identifying areas for improvement:

- Senior managers need to prioritise more effectively, for example ensuring Service Plans are SMART.
- There is a lack of clear strategy for Looked after Children's education.
- Delivery and performance monitoring needs to focus on evidencing outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Capacity is an issue for managers and caseloads are too high in some services. This means that the quality of supervision is variable with little time for reflection.
- The IT system causes a variety of issues for frontline workers.

Taking action to improve:

In order to respond to this feedback we will be looking at developing a clear, prioritised improvement plan that will take us to Good over the next three years.

This will feed into Service and Business Plans as well as team objectives. We will be looking to develop a clear vision for our Looked after Children's education and will be reviewing the role and remit of our Virtual School to help us deliver on this agenda.

We are already looking at where investment in additional workers is needed to manage increasing demands.



The LSCB has recently developed a strong local learning and improvement framework to gather and disseminate learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Serious Incident Learning Processes (SILPs).

4 Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board



What are Ofsted looking for?

In this judgement Ofsted are seeking to ensure that the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) complies with its statutory responsibilities in accordance with the Children Act 2004 and the Local Safeguarding Children Board Regulations 2006. The LSCB is able to provide evidence that it coordinates the work of statutory partners in helping, protecting and caring for children in its local area and there are mechanisms in place to monitor the effectiveness of those local arrangements. Multi-agency training in the protection and care of children is effective and evaluated regularly for impact on management and practice. The LSCB checks that policies and procedures in respect of thresholds for intervention are understood and operate effectively and identifies where there are areas for improvement. Challenge of practice between partners and casework auditing are rigorous and used to identify where improvements can be made in front-line performance and management oversight. Serious case reviews, management reviews and reviews of child deaths are used by the local authority and partners as opportunities for learning and feedback that drive improvement. The LSCB provides robust and rigorous evaluation and analysis of local performance that influence and inform the planning and delivery of high-quality services.

Ofsted have judged that the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) requires improvement

Verbal feedback from Ofsted identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Celebrating our strengths:

- There is good compliance against the key statutory guidance 'Working Together'.
- Attendance of the Board is good with the majority of members attending all meetings.
- The quarterly Safeguarding Assurance Forum effectively ensures strategic priorities are aligned. The Forum is effective in unblocking barriers and it ensures duplication of activity is avoided.
- The Independent Chair is held in high regard by partners. His roles with other local and national activity benefits the Board in Nottingham and it benefits children in Nottingham through shared experiences.
- There is good challenge to the Health and Wellbeing Board and Children's Partnership Board.
- The LSCB gives high priority to early help in planning.
- Sub groups have a good focus; there is increasing importance placed on Looked after Children and Missing Education.
- Sub groups are chaired by partners, which demonstrates their importance. The Chair provides good challenge and seeks accountability in terms of action plans.
- The LSCB has recently developed a strong local learning and improvement framework to gather and disseminate learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Serious Incident Learning Processes (SILPs).
- Learning also informs core training and specific briefings around neglect and other key issues in the City.
- Multi agency audits are themed and specifically targeted; each audit is scoped in its own right to give effective monitoring.
- Section 11 audits are done every other year; year on year the LSCB has seen greater compliance across all agencies.
- Policies and procedures are in place and additional practice guidance is cascaded to staff. The move to the Tri-X system will bring a more rigorous approach to the updating and dissemination of policies.
- There is an increasing level of engagement between the LSCB and Youth Council.

4 Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board continued

Identifying areas for improvement:

- An ongoing refresh of the Threshold document is taking place across the partnership, but Children in Need still are not clearly identified as a cohort in the Family Support Pathway.
- Evaluation of the impact of training on individual practice is underdeveloped. Partners need to deliver frameworks in their own agencies that build learning and impact from training into their practice. This will assist in monitoring effectiveness.
- The 2012/13 LSCB Annual Report is not sufficiently analytical and is too descriptive. It does not look at service weakness, causes of weakness or action to address weakness.
- There is an escalation policy but this does not appear to be used by partners.
- The Performance Framework is developing but the views of children need to be better incorporated.
- Reporting between the Independent Chair and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function could be further strengthened to ensure they are clear as to what the issues are.

Taking action to improve:

The Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board (NCSCB) has already worked hard to ensure its Annual Report for 2013/14 is more analytical.

The Board have requested that the refresh of the Family Support Strategy and Pathway more clearly identify Children in Need as a key cohort that requires safeguarding, so this has been incorporated into recent versions.

Discussions will take place at the Board and Operational Management Group in the coming months to ensure that recommendations made about the evaluation of training, the use of the escalation policy and required developments to the Performance Framework are incorporated into the Board's plans for 2014/15.

¹ The Children Act 2004; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

² The Local Safeguarding Children Boards Regulations 2006; www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/90/regulation/5/made





Over the coming weeks and months the work and improvements already in progress, and those being planned, will be shared.

As we work together to ensure that our services are consistently 'Good' we will be engaging with all relevant colleagues and partners to ensure we provide Nottingham's children and families with the best possible outcomes.

We are grateful to colleagues and partners for their continued hard work and contribution.